

POLITICAL PARTIES, ELECTIONS AND
REFERENDUMS ACT 2000



THE SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE

FIRST REPORT 2008

**Appointment of the Chairman of the
Electoral Commission**

*Presented to the House of Commons in pursuance of
paragraph 1(1) of Schedule 2 of the Political Parties,
Elections and Referendums Act 2000*

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The Speaker's Committee

The Speaker's Committee is appointed in accordance with the provisions of section 2 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 to perform the functions conferred on it by that Act.

Membership (as at 12 December 2007)

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Rt Hon Sir Alan Beith MP
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Previous Reports in this Parliament

The Second Report 2005, was published in July 2005 as House of Commons Paper No. 435 of Session 2005–06.

The Third Report 2005 was published in December 2005 as House of Commons Paper No. 783 of Session 2005-06.

The First Report 2006 was published in July 2006 as House of Commons Paper No. 1581 of Session 2005-06.

The First Report 2007 was published in August 2007 as House of Commons Paper No. 996 of Session 2006-07.

The Second Report 2007 was published in August 2007 as House of Commons Paper No. 997 of Session 2006-07

The Third Report 2007 was published in February 2008 as House of Commons Paper No. 288 of Session 2007-08

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1 Introduction

1. In January 2001, the House approved the appointment of Mr Sam Younger as the first Chairman of the Electoral Commission. Mr Younger's appointment was renewed in January 2007, for a further two years; he thus retires with effect from 1 January 2009. The Speaker's Committee is grateful to Mr Younger for his leadership of the Commission through its formative years, and wishes him well for the future.

2. Parliament established the Electoral Commission as a body independent of Government. The Chairman of the Electoral Commission and the other Electoral Commissioners are appointed by Her Majesty the Queen, following an Address from the House of Commons. Under section 3 of the Political Parties, Referendums and Elections Act 2000 (PPERA), Mr Speaker is responsible for signifying his agreement to a motion being made for such an Address. In discharging this duty, Mr Speaker works with the Speaker's Committee, which is appointed under section 2 of the same Act. Before giving his agreement, Mr Speaker has, following discussion with the Speaker's Committee, appointed panels comprised of suitably qualified persons to conduct the preliminary selection process and thereby to identify candidates. He has made it his practice to consult widely on the role description, person specification and procedures applying to the appointment of Commissioners.

2 The selection process

3. In order to assist with identifying possible candidates for the post of Chairman of the Commission in succession to Mr Sam Younger, Mr Speaker in January 2008 appointed the following Panel:

- Baroness Fritchie of Gloucester DBE (Chair)
- Ms Cindy Butts (nominated by the office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, OCPA)
- Sir Neil McIntosh CBE (a former Electoral Commissioner)
- Mr David Norgrove (Chair of the Pensions Regulator)
- Sir Peter Viggers MP (representing the Speaker's Committee)

4. The post of Electoral Commissioner does not fall to be monitored by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, but Mr Speaker and the Speaker's Committee agreed that it was desirable that this appointment, like the 2007 appointments of four Commissioners, should be treated as though it were subject to such monitoring.

5. The Panel began work in January and its Chair made her report to Mr Speaker in May. Following advertisement in the national press and a search by recruitment consultants, 13 of the 37 applicants were long-listed for initial interview, of whom four were called for final interview. The Committee is entirely satisfied that the selection process was rigorous and that the Panel discharged its duties conscientiously and with all due regard to the requirements of thoroughness, fairness and propriety. The process was certified by the OCPA representative as fully compliant with its requirements. The Committee is grateful to Baroness Fritchie and her fellow Panel members.

3 The candidate

6. The unanimous view of the Panel was that Ms Jenny Watson should be the next Chair of the Electoral Commission. Ms Watson is a former Chair of the Equal Opportunities Commission and is currently a non-executive board member of the Audit Commission. A meeting of the Speaker's Committee on 3 June endorsed the Panel's recommendation. Following this, Mr Speaker wrote to the leaders of the main parties represented in the House of Commons, formally consulting them on the proposal to nominate Ms Watson as required by section 3(2) of PPERA. No party leader raised any concern or made any objection to the proposal.

7. The Speaker's Committee invites the House to approve the decision of the Panel, endorsed by Mr Speaker and by the Committee, to recommend Ms Jenny Watson for appointment as Chair of the Electoral Commission for a four-year period, with effect from 1 January 2009. It believes that Ms Watson, whose *curriculum vitae* is annexed to this Report, has both the experience and the personal qualities to be an outstanding Chair of the Commission. Her record of change management and her proven communication skills will be important in leading the Commission through the period of substantial change that is likely to follow implementation of the proposals in the recent White Paper on party finance and expenditure. This is a high-profile and challenging role that requires an exceptional person. The Committee is satisfied that in Ms Watson it has found such a person.

4 Terms and conditions of the appointment

8. The role of Chairman of the Commission has since its creation in 2001 been full-time. The Committee takes the view that it is now appropriate for it to be discharged on a part-time basis. This decision was taken to ensure that the role remains non-executive and high-level. It was also considered important to attract the highest possible quality of applicants for the post. The soundness of the decision was borne out by the very high quality of the field of applicants, many of whom confirmed they would not have been attracted to a full-time position.

9. A description of the duties and responsibilities attached to the post is included at Annex A. The Chair remains responsible for providing leadership and cohesion to the Commission as a whole, and particularly to the college of Commissioners. There is no diminution in responsibility as a consequence of the move to a part-time role; indeed, the challenges facing the Commission in the next few years are likely to require very strong qualities of leadership. The Committee has not, therefore, recommended any reduction in salary. In its view, the appropriate rate of remuneration for the person carrying out the duties of this post remains £150,000 *per annum*.

Annex A

The role and job description¹

The Electoral Commission is facing a period of change. The Government is shortly to implement the group of recommendations on the governance of the Commission made by the Committee in Standards in Public Life.

The over-arching responsibility of the Chairman of the Electoral Commission is to give leadership to the Commissioners and, through the full-time Chief Executive, who reports to him and is the head of the Commission's staff, to the Commission generally. The Chair is also the Commission's principal public face and ambassador.

Within that context, key responsibilities include:

- giving leadership to, and working with, Commissioners, the Chief Executive and Executive Team to set the strategic direction and ensure appropriate resources and governance arrangements are in place and monitored
- ensuring efficient and effective use of public funds (in conjunction with the Commission's Accounting Officer) and that the Commission acts in accordance with the powers and duties given to it by PPERA and other legislation
- leading the change management process within the college of Commissioners itself, and in particular the forthcoming integration of Commissioners with a political background
- making, collectively with the other Commissioners, key decisions on the exercise of the Commission's statutory powers and the extent of their delegation to staff
- chairing monthly Electoral Commission meetings and other Committees as appropriate and approving strategic developments
- representing the Commission in dealings with government, politicians and political parties, the Speaker's Committee, devolved legislatures, overseas electoral commissions and international bodies and other stakeholders and acting as an ambassador for the Commission
- selecting the Chief Executive and appraising his or her performance and, with the Commissioners and the Chief Executive, selecting candidates for appointment as the most senior managers in the Commission
- discharging the statutory responsibility, personally or through a nominee, of Chief Counting Officer for the conduct of any UK-wide, national or regional referendum
- identifying and resolving any conflicting interests or activities that may affect the effectiveness, independence or impartiality of the Commission, particularly in relation

¹ As agreed by the Speaker's Committee and supplied to applicants for the post.

to the regulation of political parties following the appointment of Commissioners with political experience

- serving as a member of the Commission's Remuneration Committee and, if required, such other committees as may be established from time to time.

The person specification²

Important: please review the following before proceeding further:

It is essential that in your application, you meet as many of the criteria listed below as possible. You must also not be disqualified by law from being appointed as a Commissioner because you have in the last ten years been an elected politician (other than a parish or community councillor), an officer or employee of a political party, or a reported donor or lender to a political party. In addition, if appointed as Chair you may not be a member of a registered political party. The relevant legislation can be found in section 3(4) of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 and section 74 and Schedule 1 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

With a personal profile at national level, you must be able to demonstrate substantial experience, integrity, and significant achievement of:

- leading, or contributing to the leadership and strategic direction of a complex and changing organisation with multiple stakeholders operating in a political environment.
- public speaking, chairing meetings and undertaking media and ambassadorial work
- understanding and/or experience of the political and regulatory context in which the Electoral Commission operates
- applying legislation and, ideally, taking and reviewing regulatory decisions at board level
- experience of roles that have required independent and impartial contributions in the delivery of public or other services
- experience of or an ability to create and maintain credibility with a range of stakeholders such as ministers, electoral administrators, politicians and political parties, devolved administrations and the wider public
- a personal style that demonstrates authority, commitment, consistency and fairness
- ability to promote the Commission's and voters' interests to stakeholders, the media and the general public
- undisputed integrity, with the ability to think clearly and exercise sound judgment
- strong understanding of diversity in the context of the work of the Electoral Commission.

2 As agreed by the Speaker's Committee and supplied to applicants for the post.

Annex B

Jenny Watson: Curriculum Vitae

Portfolio as at May 2008

Board Member, Audit Commission, September 2007 – ongoing

Non executive board member for this independent public body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently, and effectively in the areas of local government, housing, health, criminal justice and fire and rescue services.

Non-Executive Director, WRAP, September 2007 – ongoing

NED for this company which works in partnership to encourage and enable businesses and consumers to be more efficient in their use of materials and recycle more things more often. This helps to minimise landfill, reduce carbon emissions and improve our environment.

Member, Advertising Advisory Committee, ASA, January 2005 – present

Committee established in January 2005 to provide independent, third party advice to the Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice, to ensure that the concerns of consumers and stakeholders are taken into account whenever the codes are revised or updated. BCAP writes the rules that control television and radio advertising.

Associate, Global Partners and Associates, August 2004 – present

Global Partners works with national and international clients on projects relating to democracy, governance and human rights both nationally and internationally. Company's scope includes training, evaluation and more general consultancy projects. Was a founding director of the company in 2004, took a sabbatical while chair of EOC, returned as an associate to pursue limited projects of particular interest.

Company's clients include UNESCO, UNDP, British Council, Mental Health Act Commission, Ford Foundation, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Justice and the Equalities and Human Rights Commission.

Previous board experience

Chair, Equal Opportunities Commission November 2005 – September 2007 Acting Chair June-Nov 2005; Deputy Chair June 2000 – June 2005, Commissioner from May 1999

Deputy Chairman, Banking Code Standards Board, February 2005 – December 2006
Independent Director from January 2001

Committee on Radioactive Waste Management, November 2003 – November 2006
Deputy Chair, and Member

Chair, Transparency Independent Review Panel, UK Nirex Ltd August 2000 – October 2003

Previous employment

Sole trader Jenny Watson Consulting and Partner, Watson Wilkinson Self-employed 2001 – 2004

Human Rights Act Research Unit, King's College London: 2000 – 2001, Development Director

Victim Support: 1999, Head of Media & PR

Charter88: 1996 – 1998, Campaign and Communications Manager

Waste Watch: June – December 1995, Press and Marketing Officer

Liberty: 1993 – summer 1995, Promotions Officer

Education and training

Open University Certificate in Management

MA Twentieth Century British History, University of Westminster

BA Communication Studies, Sheffield Hallam University